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ABSTRACT

A field-responsive academic development program, the Hartford Higher Education Hispanic Project, was implemented to facilitate access to and continuation in three Hartford colleges by Hispanic students. It finances a Learning Skills/Resource Center housed at the University of Hartford and educational/guidance supportive services and activities at all three participating colleges: the Greater Hartford Community College and the Hartford State Technical College are the other colleges. The project is essentially field-responsive. It reflects the commitment of the participating colleges to respond to the educational needs of the Hispanic community and it acknowledges the advantages inherent in field-basing by centering several of its activity components in the community. A survey/assessment procedure was undertaken to identify the needs that were perceived by community and agency representatives, potential program participants and enrollees, project staff members, and college consortium faculty members. Based on a review of survey results, the curriculum projected by the Learning Skills/Resource Center for the training program implemented in the 1979 summer session at the University of Hartford focused on: English as a Second Language, reading, mathematics, and study skills. These areas were supplemented with supportive services including career counseling and personal guidance. Anticipated short-term and long-term outcomes of the program are cited. (SW)

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HOPE AND HELP FOR HISPANICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A

Hartford Higher Education Collaborative Program

Funded By The Ford Foundation

Albert I. Freedman
Executive Assistant
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HOPE AND HELP FOR HISPANICS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Hope and help are the results of a field-responsive academic development program, the Hartford Higher Education Hispanic Project. Designed to facilitate access to and continuation in three Hartford colleges by Hispanic students, the Project is funded by the Ford Foundation. It finances a Learning Skills/Resource Center housed at the University of Hartford and educational/guidance supportive services and activities at all three participating colleges. The institutions include the University of Hartford, the Greater Hartford Community College and the Hartford State Technical College. Together they constitute a consortium whose collaborative efforts are directed toward more adequately meeting the post-secondary needs of Hartford's Hispanic community.

FIELD-RESPONSIVE AND FIELD-BASED APPROACHES

Field-responsiveness is the primary characteristic of the Hartford program although it contains elements of a field-based approach also. There is a significant difference between the two delivery systems. Each has distinct advantages and the Hispanic Project has successfully combined them into a community oriented program which has potential for maximal effectiveness.

Field-responsive and field-based efforts may have similar objectives. Too frequently, however, field-based education relies on a simple change of locale. The community agency, the vacant store, the neighborhood school or the empty tenement becomes the classroom. The college instructor packs his text, reference materials and his lecture notes, and for the time specified, teaches his regular campus course out in the community.

Certainly, the field based approach has advantages. It is convenient for participants and its high degree of visibility proclaims college commitment to the community. Closer examination, however, may reveal that such programs often expose the enrollees to the identical content as well as the same teaching-learning modes which exist on campus. To the extent that the Hispanic student has similar experiences, preparation and needs as his on-campus Anglo counterpart, such an approach may be warranted. If, as is likely to be the case, the Hispanic student has specific and unique educational needs, then an approach which is confined to field-basing may not achieve the projected results.

The Hartford Higher Education Hispanic Project is essentially field-responsive. It reflects the commitment of the participating colleges to respond to the educational needs of the Hispanic community and its college-bound or matriculated students. It also acknowledges the advantages inherent in field-basing by centering several of its activity components in the community.

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY/PARTICIPANT RESPONSIVENESS

In order to establish the high degree of responsiveness to community and participant educational needs, the Project designed and implemented a detailed and comprehensive survey-assessment procedure. Four distinct groups were surveyed with formal and/or informal assessment techniques to identify the needs which they perceived as essential to project success. Included in the survey were:

... community and agency representatives,
... potential program participants and enrollees,
... project staff members,
... college consortium faculty members.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF PARTICIPANT NEEDS

With considerable justification, the Hartford Hispanic community has complained that many past educational efforts at college level have failed to actively involve Hispanic representatives in a consideration of needs. The point is well taken. Community perception of what is required is a defensible and necessary ingredient of effective program planning.

Recognizing the contribution that community in-put can make at the time of Project initiation as well as during its implemental and review stages, the Project Coordinator and her assistant began an intensive campaign of community contacts. Agency personnel, status individuals, political leaders and such others as might be expected to speak for the various publics which comprise the Hispanic community participated in dialogue with the Project staff.

Both entree and communication was facilitated by the fact that the Project Coordinator and her assistant are Hispanic and their credentials had been informally discussed, reviewed and endorsed by several Hispanic community leaders.

As a result of several weeks of staff-community interviews, it was concluded that the community's view of educational priorities for the potential college student and those already enrolled included:

... intensive academic English as a Second Language,
... English composition,
... reading,
... mathematics,
... study skills.

PARTICIPANT PERCEPTION OF NEEDS

The needs which participants perceived gave focus to the general concerns expressed by community leaders and agency personnel. Using a variety of communications devices, the Project staff apprised the community about the projected program. They stressed the manner in which it would function and the extent to which it would assist Hispanics in entering and/or continuing in college. Informational techniques included:

... developing and distributing news letters and announcements,
... preparing and recording radio announcements,
... presenting a radio interview,
... preparing and arranging for newspaper releases,
... responding to telephone inquiries,
... responding to individual and institutional referrals,
... interpreting the program to the college faculties,
... conferencing with community and agency leadership.

As a result of this intensive approach, potential candidates contacted the Project office and were scheduled for an informal interview with a Project staff member. From such discussions it was concluded that the applicants perceived their needs to include:

... intensive academic English as a Second Language,

... mathematics,

... career counseling,

... extensive and structured educational programming.

STAFF PERCEPTION OF NEEDS

Assessment problems are compounded for Hispanics. There is nearly a total absence of validated materials which use Spanish to evaluate factors which

are significant to college entrance and continuation. For the Spanish dominant applicant whose high school examinations and college boards were in English, final scores may be a less than acceptable indicator of true potential for post-secondary education. Indeed, as an accurate assessment of the Spanish dominant pupil's high school experience, English test devices are also subject to question.

To further assess participant needs, the Project staff supplemented dialogue with the Hispanic community leadership and interviews with potential enrollees with two tests considered to have a high degree of validity for this Project. One device used was the Michigan English Placement Test. The other was the Spanish language Diagnostic Mathematics Test developed by the Greater Hartford Community College faculty for use with Hispanic students.

Based on the several approaches identified above, the staff concluded that the participants needed:

... projective and receptive English language skills,

... English comprehension skills,

... mathematic skills,

... study skills.

FACULTY PERCEPTION OF NEEDS

Although the Hispanic enrollment at all three cooperating institutions is presently minimal, the combined expertise of the faculties in meeting the needs of Spanish dominant students is considerable. Each of the colleges has had members of its faculty actively involved in courses and programs

designed specifically for Spanish speaking students. Such efforts have ranged from teaching English as a Second Language to developing curriculum and teaching mathematics to non-English speaking students.

In addition to personnel who instruct in such areas presently, there are many others who have the specialized background significant to the educational needs of Hispanic students. Consequently, within the faculties of the institutions collaborating in the Higher Education Hispanic Project, there is a considerable body of experience and expertise.

It was the considered professional judgement of such faculty members that a program of supportive assistance to entering and enrolled Hispanic students should include:

... English as a Second Language,

... English reading skills,

... English writing skills,

... English understanding skills,

... mathematics skills,

... study skills.

INITIATING AND DEVELOPING THE PROGRAM

A review of the survey results outlined above will indicate that each of the groups expressed similar views relative to participant needs. Consequently, the curriculum projected by the Learning Skills/Resource Center for the first cycle of the training program implemented in the 1979 summer session at the University of Hartford focused on:

... English as a Second Language,

... reading,

... mathematics,

... study skills.

These areas were supplemented with supportive services including career counseling and personal guidance.

In early July, a staff of 8 specialists initiated the program with 38 Hispanics who, on the basis of assessments, demonstrated the highest degree of potential for college success. The students, now Greater Hartford residents, originally came from such areas as Spain, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Columbia and Peru.

For five full days a week during a six week period, participants experienced a learning environment which was structured to be as supportive and non-threatening as possible. The summer program enrollees were generally maintained as a community. This created the positive circumstances which minimized attrition, built interpersonal support systems and facilitated instruction to meet the specific, unique needs of the Hispanic students. Opportunities for interaction with other University summer session enrollees were ample and served not only to enhance English proficiency but reduce any semblance of isolation.

Structuring the summer program as a community also provided the maximum potential for capitalizing on the linguistic similarity of the students in the learning situation. Although individualization characterized the instructional approach, the fact that participants were all Spanish-dominant facilitated the process.

During the present 1979-80 academic year, the Learning Skills/Resource Center is conducting a second cycle of developmental activities and supportive services for a group of 64 Hispanics. Cycle II is scheduled in the late afternoon and early evening to accommodate participants who work during the day or whose family obligations make attendance at an earlier time very difficult.

Additionally, the Center is providing Hispanics enrolled at the cooperating colleges with individualized academic assistance and counseling. A tutorial and/or small group approach is utilized to further develop the requisite basic skills for college success.

Short-term outcomes of the program are anticipated by the staff to include:

... an improved recruitment program of Hispanic high school students and adults for the collaborating institutions,

... an improved potential for college admission of Hispanics,

... an improved level of assistance to Hispanic college students in English, basic skills and supportive services.

Long-term outcomes are expected to include:

... an increased number of Hispanic college graduates at all degree levels,

... an increased opportunity for employment of Hispanics,

... an increased opportunity for Hispanics to assume community leadership roles,

... an increased effectiveness in the development of instructional techniques and procedures to strengthen and extend bilingual/transitional education,

... an increased opportunity to share effective programs with other higher education institutions.

The Hartford Higher Education Hispanic Project has as its objective for Hispanic students the achievement of academic success rather than mere survival. It has the resources and the commitment to provide Hispanics with hope --- and with hope the help that will make it possible for them to enter the mainstream of college and the community.